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Abstract

Optimism concerning the future of higher education was the keynote of this address by the Assistant Secretary for Education and US Commissioner of Education. He cites the atmosphere of change pervading the nation's campuses and the federal commitment to higher education represented by the establishment of new and the reorganization of existing programs by the US Office of Education. He stressed the need for careful planning by both the government and institutions of higher education in this period of widespread social and institutional change. "The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, particularly the Office of Education, has, I believe, a definite responsibility in helping to chart the future of higher education." (JS)

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HIGHER EDUCATION -- A VIEW FROM WASHINGTON*

Address by James E. Allen, Jr.
Assistant Secretary for Education
and
U.S. Commissioner of Education

As many of you know, my position in New York State included responsibility for higher education, and so the problems which engage your attention have long been my concern also.

There are many of these problems, such as the racial crisis, which is receiving your special attention at this meeting, campus unrest, finance and so on, which I should like to discuss with you, but it seemed more appropriate to use my time with you this evening to share the new perspective on higher education afforded by my position here in Washington.

The most significant dimension of this new perspective has been the confirmation of my feeling of optimism concerning the future of higher education. Some of this optimism was expressed in a recent article of mine entitled, "Why Would Anyone Want To Be A College President?". By an accident of magazine makeup, I got an immediate answer of sorts in an advertisement on the opposite page urging in great black letters: "Be A Football Genius!".

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* Before Annual Meeting of the American Council on Education, Shoreham Hotel, Washington, D.C., 7:00 p.m., October 9, 1969.

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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It is indeed a commentary on the times to realize that the football coach, long considered to hold the most hazardous and short-tenured of all college jobs, suddenly has yielded his place as a prime target, scapegoat and fall guy to the college president. Indeed, one can but admire the confidence of one of our distinguished colleagues (who shall be nameless) whose patience and fortitude, like that of Jacob, allows him to think in terms so lengthy as seven years!

But despite the uncertainties of the college presidency and the formidable problems that abound in both the present and the future of higher education, this <u>is</u> a time of opportunity.

It is of course true that in the present situation there are constraints -- particularly financial ones, which, regretfully, must influence immediate operations, but the long-range picture encourages the hope that the needs which we foresee for higher education can be met.

This is a time when we are searching for new patterns of financial support to make it possible for all who can profit from post-secondary school education to have it, whatever their economic or social circumstances. There will undoubtedly be a considerable period of trial and error before we hit upon exactly the right pattern for the sharing of financial responsibility for higher education between the private citizen and his government, and among the various levels of government.

The important thing in my view is the strength and clarity of the national commitment to higher education. It is a commitment transcending partisanship. It is a commitment expressed by the last Administration and reaffirmed by President Nixon.

This commitment is evidenced by such things as the requirement of Section 508 of the Higher Education Amendments of 1968, calling upon the President to submit to the Congress not later than December 31, 1969, "proposals relative to the feasibility of making available a post-secondary education to all young Americans who qualify and seek it." It is also manifest in such things as the appointment this week of a Presidential Task Force on Higher Education, headed by President James Hester of New York University, and by the plans in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare for the development of a "comprehensive Community College Career Education Act of 1970."

Of even greater significance than these developments, perhaps, in terms of the character and quality of future higher education opportunities, is the atmosphere of change that is pervading the campuses of our Nation. In justification of the wisdom and foresight of many college administrators and faculty, it should be noted that many of the reforms currently being advocated have long been proposed and sought. This period of widespread dissatisfaction and unrest is providing the possibility of achieving a fundamental restructuring and revitalization of our post-secondary school programs and institutions.

But the perspective which has confirmed my feeling of optimism about the future of higher education has also brought into sharper focus certain hazards that could frustrate our hopes for making the most of this time of opportunity.

These hazards lie in the possibility of our failure of (1) to plan for change, and (2) to prepare the way for change -- or, in other words, to decide where we want to go and how to make it possible to get there.

Planning has, of course, always been necessary for orderly development, but never has it been more essential than now, or more difficult.

The kind of objectivity that is required for planning is extremely hard to come by when so much of the time and energy of those responsible is consumed with reacting to and dealing with the immediate pressures and the far-reaching results of campus unrest.

In addition to this difficulty, there is that of the uncertainty of financial support in times which create questions not only of the adequacy of support but also of the effects of changing patterns and sources of support.

Then, underlying all these present difficulties of planning, is the knowledge that the future we are attempting to chart will not only see change, but change so fundamental in character as to pose the possibility of total transformation of our system of higher education.

Rather than serving as any justification, however, for either timidity or delay in planning, the very nature of these difficulties emphasizes its importance and the imperative need to be objective, judicious, selective, and -- most of all -- unpanicked.

The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, particularly the Office of Education, has, I believe, a definite responsibility in helping to chart the future of higher education. In the past few months we have moved both to strengthen our general capability for this function and to initiate a number of studies and programs.

For example:

-- A new Office of Deputy Assistant Secretary/Commissioner for Planning, Research and Evaluation has been created for the purpose of coordinating more effectively these essential functions. This office will give increased attention to higher education, concentrating not only on research and development, but also on better means of making the results of research and development available to the policy makers and administrators in the field. This office will foster the development of a variety of experimental models as new approaches to reform and change in higher education.

-- The Bureau of Higher Education will be strengthened by the creation of the position of Deputy Commissioner for Higher Education, whose primary function will be to assist in the formulation of plans and policies in this field.

-- The increasing importance of the Community and Junior Colleges in the total American educational enterprise is to be recognized by the establishment of a special high-level unit in the Office of Education serving this area.

-- A Committee on Campus Unrest has been appointed for the purpose of examining all ways in which the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare can respond constructively and promptly when the need arises for Federal assistance.

-- An Office of Students and Youth has been established in the Office of Education, staffed by students and youth, whose assignment is to maintain an open channel to young people across the Nation and to see to it that HEW policies and programs reflect the needs and views of students and youth.

-- Also, contemplated is the setting aside of a modest amount of research funds for financing student-sponsored projects, administered by youth and students.

These activities of the Office of Education provide some indication of the directions in which higher education is moving. They also reflect principles and needs which must be guideposts for higher education's future course:

-- Increasing access to higher education opportunities for all qualified youth

-- Developing realistic means for the involvement of all parts of the academic community in the formulation and administration of programs and activities

-- Removing all vestiges of injustice, discrimination and prejudice in the treatment of disadvantaged groups

-- Actively involving the higher education community in the special problems of society, particularly urban problems

-- Preserving academic freedom and institutional autonomy

-- Retaining and encouraging the diversity and innovation provided by our system of dual control in higher education

-- Reinforcing the continuing need for support from all sectors of society, public and private.

To consider these principles and needs is to realize the enormity of the task of melding such variety and scope into a coordinated, clear plan for the future of post-secondary education.

We must, however, address ourselves to this task, for the day is passed when noble sentiments and generalized statements of need are sufficient to engender necessary support.

The realization of the potential of this time of opportunity depends in large measure on our ability to translate our decisions as to the future of higher education into definite plans of action.

But the preparation and presentation of plans will remove only one of the hazards that could thwart our hopes. The magnitude and novelty of plans that foresee a really new day in higher education preclude the possibility of easy or automatic approval, and the forces of education must accept the necessity of a more concentrated effort to marshal support.

This effort will face formidable obstacles. First to be overcome will be a pervasive and debilitating lack of confidence in the efficacy of much of our present system which, justified or not, has crept into public thinking.

Financial support sought amidst an ever greater competition for both public and private funds will be won only by the most cogent, well reasoned and persuasive case.

Also to be overcome will be the natural resistance to change. The extent of such resistance is determined by the degree of change, and change of the magnitude contemplated for higher education can thus be expected to generate resistance of massive proportions.

Our success in overcoming these obstacles depends on finding an answer to the question of how the forces of education can best use their power to achieve their goals. Indeed my experience in this job to date has convinced me that this is one of the most important challenges we face.

The forces of education have the potential of enormous power, stemming from the nature of education itself, from an inherent respect for the educator, and from the vast numbers of individuals associated with the education enterprise. In my opinion, however, this potential has not been realized. Power has been underused, diffused, dissipated, and too often diverted from fundamental considerations to special interests and relatively minor matters.

If the forces of higher education are to prepare the way for an acceptance of their plans for the future, every bit of power at their command must be put to use. The concentration of their power on the achievement of goals cannot be left to chance but must be systematically programed into the overall thrust of their efforts.

So many needs, ideas and goals are competing for support in these turbulent times of social change that it can no longer be assumed that education will have its rightful place or be allotted its rightful share of support. Our voices must be heard, not just at times of special crisis, but in a steady flow that will keep educational considerations in the forefront of both public and governmental thinking and be an everpresent, continuing influence on the course of the development of education.

In conclusion then, may I state once more the feeling of optimism that my Washington perspective gives on the future of higher education in our Nation. The hazards of failure to plan with sufficient conciseness and clarity, or to take those actions which will prepare the way for fulfillment of plans are very real.

Very real also, however, among the members of the higher education community is the recognition that this is indeed a time of opportunity -- a recognition that has generated a growing openness to change and a spirit of determination to overcome whatever hazards or obstacles may lie in the way of honoring our responsibility to provide post-secondary educational opportunity for all those who qualify and seek it.

From those frantic post-war days of accommodating a flood of GI students, through a period of unprecedented building and expansion of facilities, into these days of efforts to adapt to a period of fundamental social change, higher education has a remarkable record of success in meeting its obligations to the youth of our Nation and to society. With even greater demands ahead, I am confident that we shall not now fail to continue this record of success that has contributed so much to the progress of our Nation.

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